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## Sex in the Room: An Imaginative Crime Scene Involving Trafficked Women

### Abstract

In September 2007 in Trafalgar Square, London, a trafficked woman's bedroom was recreated as part of an exhibition, *The Journey*, organised by Helen Bamber to raise public awareness on the condition of trafficked women for sexual exploitation. A blood-stained bed moving up and down automatically, a brush and perfumes, a small mirror with 'help me' written on it, and a blonde wig were the details of that tiny unglamorous room shown to the public. The function and scope of the exhibition was far from 'artistic'. The exhibition aimed to raise consciousness that human beings, mainly women, are trafficked into rich destination countries, such as Britain, to be used in the sex industry as sexual objects to be consumed cheaply. If these women are imported in Britain is because there are people willing to consume the product. The 'room' of the exhibition becomes the iconic place where the victim is held against her will to perform sexual duties under duress. The room therefore functions as a crime scene: this contained physical space is the prison of an enslaved human being, repeatedly abused physically, sexually and mentally. However, it is questioned how the reconstruction of this crime scene can be perceived by the public. It is argued that the exhibit can evoke different responses. Visitors animate the space with imagined crimes (repeated violent crimes, rapes) in the silent absence of the victim; and they can imagine as much or as little as they want or can, based on their knowledge.



# Law Text Culture

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## Crime Scenes

edited by  
**Rebecca Scott Bray and Derek Dalton**

## **Sex in the Room: An Imaginative Crime Scene Involving Trafficked Women**

**Marinella Marmo**

### **London – Trafalgar Square September 2007**

In September 2007, a bedroom was installed in Trafalgar Square, London. As part of a wider exhibition about human trafficking, the room attempts to address the lack of empathy and attention towards trafficked victims in the sex markets of destination countries. If the idea of the sex market entails glamour and eroticism, then this bedroom provides the reality check: a dirty, claustrophobic, odorous, wallpapered space with a stained bed and a sink; a scene that aims to raise awareness about the ruthless, rather than glamorous, conditions under which trafficked people are forced to operate.

Despite commonplace representations of sex as stimulating and consensual — billboards with their tenor of alluring sex, for example — the room reminds us that the sex market is much more complex and distressing. The room illuminates the inelegant and repulsive aspects of the sex trade; a place where a prostitute performs against her or his will in abject conditions. Yet, despite this, the residents of rich destination countries are typically sheltered from this reality; we consume sex in a sexualised society, demanding the young often exotic body, yet we also look away. There is clearly a market for this ‘product’ (see Fergus 2005 for instance), and yet we, the consumer society, do not want to

face the grim side of this trade. This bedroom, then, represents our wake-up call: the room exists and it is frequently used.

Included as part of the Helen Bamber Foundation exhibition — titled *The Journey*<sup>1</sup> — the function and scope of the bedroom was far from ‘artistic’. As the title suggests, the exhibition references the journey of a young woman from her country of origin to the destination country, where she has become a victim of sex trafficking. *The Journey* is clearly concerned with charting the trajectory through loss of identity to sex object. Central to the exhibition is the role of rich destination countries, such as Britain and Australia, in human trafficking, specifically the trafficking of women for sex. For some time, this form of transnational crime had been seen as a violation of immigration laws and the fault of countries of origin — similar to the production and exportation of illicit drugs. In all this, the moral community has remained largely sheltered — in their own countries — from knowledge of human trafficking and the fate of these women (Marmo and LaForgia 2008). After a timid change in 2000 about the role of ‘demand’ (UNODC 2006), the United Nations (UN) recently adopted a stronger approach and a different slogan: ‘Trafficking: a crime that shames us all’ for its ‘Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking’ (hereinafter UN.GIFT, see UN.GIFT 2009a). With this change, the emphasis on responsibility is also placed on destination countries as places of demand, in a key attempt to raise awareness amongst the public of those countries. The bedroom in Trafalgar Square aims to show us that we are part of the problem, and therefore we should be part of the solution. In seeking to raise public awareness about the condition of women trafficked for sexual exploitation, the bedroom aims to make visible the image that slides away from view. Consequently, *The Journey*’s message was embraced by UN.GIFT during its exhibition in Vienna in February 2008; receiving similar support when it travels to New York in December 2009.

As one section of *The Journey* exhibition, the bedroom becomes the iconic place where the victim is held prisoner to perform sexual duties under duress. Its crude contents suggest as much: a blood-stained bed moving up and down automatically; a brush, lipsticks and

perfumes; a small mirror displaying the words ‘help me’; ‘screaming mouth’ patterned wallpaper; and a blonde wig — squalid evidence of *the Journey* trafficked women must endure and the things they must do. This contained physical space is the prison of an enslaved person: someone who cannot escape, is held against her will, her passport and documents taken away, who is stripped of her identity as well as her dignity. The literature on imprisonment and its mental and physical consequences — the alienation, the survival skills, and the subjugation — could easily be applied to these women’s conditions (see Zimmerman et al 2006, Shigekane 2007).

Undoubtedly the bedroom functions as a prison. Yet this article argues that the bedroom also functions as a crime scene. In this physical space, these women are repeatedly abused — physically, sexually and mentally — by different perpetrators, including traffickers, brothel owners and clients. However, whilst we are used to considering the traffickers as the ‘bad guys’ for border security reasons, and we are becoming accustomed to point our fingers at the brothel owners as buyers of this product, clients have been overlooked. Clients, in fact, are the reason why these women are imported in the first place. Now Britain is displaying a willingness to criminalise clients who have sex with forced sex workers, even when knowledge of such conditions is not disclosed (*Policing and Crime Bill* 2009). In this new legal atmosphere the bedroom takes on a loaded meaning — it becomes the space where violence and rape take place instead of consensual sex. A key argument of this article is that the room is more than a place of trade — as the key locus of violence, it is a crime scene.

A second argument of the article aims to question the intended and unintended functions and meanings of the bedroom when its impact on the public is analysed. Distinct from the intended consequences of the organisers of this initiative — to raise awareness — there may be unintended interpretations and perceptions of what the room represents and how it is intended to function. That is, we might begin to think of how the room exists not only as a useful tool to concretise UN.GIFT’s goals for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC),

but the ways in which the room might also fail to be an effective representation despite the close attention paid to presenting the squalid evidence of human trafficking. Does it pay to be a prepared reader of crime and human trafficking at *The Journey* and by what means are we prepared — law? policy? If we are ready for the crime scene, does the room meet our expectations or subvert them, and are our viewing positions simple or complicated? How might the room of *The Journey* neglect to negotiate the complexities of human trafficking? The final section of the article tackles these questions by shedding light on the difficulties with crime policy and perception raised by this exhibition.

### **Along the Journey there is a Bedroom**

According to UNODC, 161 countries are affected by trafficking, encompassing countries of origin, transition or destination (UNODC 2006). Based on estimates of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), almost two and a half million people around the world have been trafficked and work under duress (ILO 2005),<sup>2</sup> for an estimated profit of US\$ 31.6 billion (Besler 2005 as cited by UN.GIFT 2007).

Trafficking for *consumption* in the sex market has been recorded as the most common form of exploitation (79%) compared to other forced labour (18%) (UN.GIFT 2009d: 6).<sup>3</sup> Women and girls mostly between the ages of 18–24<sup>4</sup> (IOM 2006) represent the vast majority (98%) of those trafficked who are forced to work in the sex market. Consent, even if initially obtained, is considered irrelevant (Art. 3b of the 2000 *UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children* (hereinafter *Trafficking Protocol*). This is because forms of deception, exploitation of vulnerable conditions, abuse of power, coercion and fraud are all means included and penalised by Article 3 of the *Trafficking Protocol*.<sup>5</sup>

When the UN launched its UN.GIFT initiative in March 2007, the banner and slogan adopted demonstrated a new approach in the fight against trafficking: ‘Trafficking: a crime that shames us all’. This is a fundamental turning point in the attempt to counteract human

trafficking. Since the 2000 UN *Trafficking Protocol* — signed by 117 countries — the emphasis has been on the exploiters, the traffickers. It was clear that the Protocol was targeting organised and serious forms of crime, being supplementary to the ‘parent’ Palermo Convention against transnational organised crime.<sup>6</sup>

In the war against trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation, we have witnessed, on the one hand, a restriction on national border, migration-management policies and an intensification of the fight against organised crime; and on the other, a greater call for a human rights approach based on the conditions of the trafficked person (see for instance Gallagher 2001, Goodey 2003, Munro 2006, Kempadoo 2007). The multilateral insistence of different lobbies (including political and human rights groups as well as academics) to emphasise the human tragedy beyond the ‘business’ are the driving forces for the establishment of UN.GIFT. With this initiative, the UN has tried to progress the humanitarian intervention with a diversified sense of responsibility. In addition to tackling the traffickers and organised crime, the initiative offers victim assistance and a more comprehensive reflection on the demand side of trafficking. UN.GIFT is therefore trying to push the boundaries of a mere criminal justice collaboration across countries. Having embraced a pro-active and comprehensive approach, we might argue that UN.GIFT is trying to be a new *product* of transnational effort, pioneering cooperation at a new level (UN.GIFT 2009 b and c).

The UN.GIFT campaign ‘Trafficking: a crime that shames us all’ also aims to achieve a new level of involvement where trafficking is ‘everybody’s business’, and awareness campaigns are recognised as being of equal importance to other security-oriented strategies. Well-known people, pop-icons and celebrities have joined UN.GIFT in an unprecedented attempt to raise awareness. Academy-award winner Emma Thompson,<sup>7</sup> singer Ricky Martin, and *Bollywood actor* Amitabh Bachchan are some of the prominent names involved with UN.GIFT in a unique movement to explain that human trafficking exists and it is not distant from ‘us’.

This is why awareness strategies are believed to be important not



only in the countries of origin and transition, but of destination as well. According to the UN Global Patterns Report (UNODC 2006), rich nation-states are the most frequent destinations of trafficked human beings (for instance, Western Europe, North America, West Asia). Where do they go? How can these people, these victims, disappear within our communities? Who 'purchases' this 'product'? With this background in mind, the British initiative *The Journey* aims to produce a new sense of awareness which is not based on a generic and abstract discussion on human trafficking and sexual exploitation. *The Journey* aims to design a specific campaign to *show* the difficult, squalid, humiliating and de-humanised conditions of women trafficked for the sex industry once they arrive in the destination country.

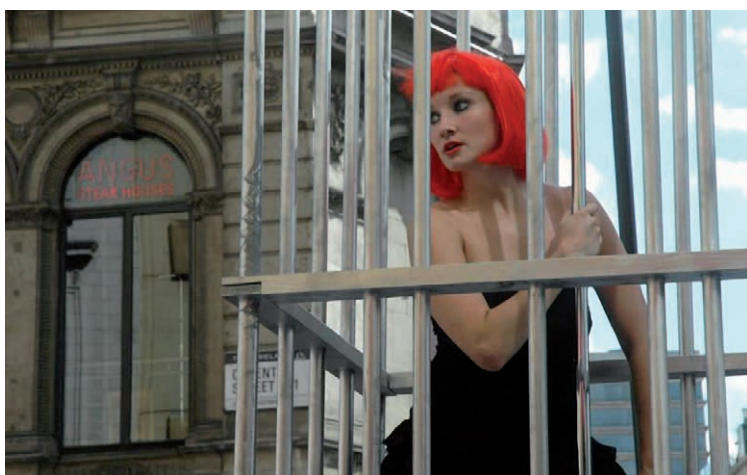


Figure 1. A photograph depicting the parade in London in September 2007. This one is 'the cage' as we often refer to trafficking as modern slavery. Reproduced courtesy of Helen Bamber Foundation, copyright of Dana Popa.

Started as an art and action exhibition at the end of 2007, *The Journey* seeks to raise the profile of what trafficking actually entails for the victims.

The co-founders of this initiative, Emma Thompson, Sam Roddick and the Helen Bamber Foundation, envisaged *The Journey* as a two-stage exhibition: the parade in September 2007 across the streets of London (Figure 1), and the 'static' art exhibition, which was strategically held in popular tourist destination Trafalgar Square at the end of September 2007 (Figure 2). The static exhibition later formed part of the UN Global Conference on Human Trafficking in February 2008 when UNODC met in Vienna. It will be installed in New York in December 2009, as announced by the UNODC's New York Office (2009).

The static exhibition, *the Journey*, consists of seven containers set in a row, each of them designed to represent a theme or stage in the journey of a victim. The visitor is invited inside to witness this journey, and possibly reflect on the different stages and their significance. The initial stage is entitled *Hope*. It refers to the hopes of a young girl for a bright future and contains children's drawings and notes about possible professional activities children dream of performing later in life. This stage is juxtaposed to the second container, *The Journey*. *The Journey* represents the physical journey from the country of origin to the destination country, as well as the darker and aggressive opening process of the victim's body and mind, whereby she becomes 'ready' to perform.

The third container, *The Uniform*, aims to continue the narrative of this violent process through stripping off the victim's identity. In this space we can see lingerie, and pictures of how enslaved women are forced to move their bodies in sexual performances. *The Bedroom* is the fourth container, and represents the workspace, the 'office', as discussed in the next section. In the fifth container, the visitor confronts *The Customer*, videotaped actors posing as clients, using graphic language while discussing their experiences. The sixth container, *The Stigma*, emphasises how and why these women feel like outcasts, as being labelled as 'prostitute' is derogative for the victim and her relatives. This also may signify the impossibility of reaching out for help while being a victim, but also later in life. The final container is the most controversial and is entitled *Resurrection*. The name would suggest a positive outcome, what to look forward to once 'saved'; yet, the container is wallpapered

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with authentic Home Office interviews where these victims' testimonies are challenged and their credibility doubted. Each container therefore has a strong meaning and function. The question of how to represent the seven stages has witnessed the involvement of leading artists and designers, including high-profile Oscar-winning film designer Michael Howells, Oscar-winning costume designer Sandy Powell, and Turner Prize winning sculptor Anish Kapoor (UNODC 2008).



Figure 2. The containers in Trafalgar Square assembled as a one-way only. Reproduced courtesy of Helen Bamber Foundation, copyright of Dana Popa. One would question if there is really an 'exit' at the end of the tunnel.

## The Bedroom as Crime Scene

Moving through *The Uniform*, the visitor arrives at *The Bedroom*. This wallpapered room contains a bed, a sink, a mirror and cosmetics. The word 'office' is written on the door. This is where the prostitute receives a client and performs her 'work'. Nevertheless, it is clear that the

reconstructed bedroom aims to show the claustrophobic environment from where there is no escape. This is highlighted in the details presented: the bed moving up and down represents the incessant and ceaseless ‘work’ of these women. With dozens of men coming and going everyday, the bed suggests there is no time to rest or wash. The bed is bloodstained, as if to symbolise cumulative sexual abuse, consequent body reaction (including diseases) and ill health (see Figure 3). The smell is intended to be ‘heavy’: the sweat of many men combined with a lack of fresh air. And the experience is also aural: the virtual visitor can access the room via a hyperlink<sup>8</sup> to be exposed to squeaky, unbearably overpowering ‘sex’ sounds. By zooming in, the virtual visitor can see that the wallpaper does not have an abstract floral pattern, but that each *flower* is a screaming mouth. Consequently, there is little room for the viewer to imagine *anything but* violence in this space.

To support this reading, the physical construction of the bedroom was based on evidence and deductive reasoning. The scene was reconstructed in consultation with a former victim — now both a witness and survivor — Elena Vargas, a Moldavian woman who was trafficked to Britain when she was eighteen (UNODC 2008). Vargas’s recollections of actual crime scenes were used to envisage how *this* crime scene could be realistically manifested. This room echoes with the facts and details of transnational crime, built according to Vargas’s testimony. And as noted above, the room is designed to literally ‘look like’ a crime scene (see Figure 3); bloodstains on the bed signal violence and inscriptions on the mirror testify to imprisonment and fear. As if to further suggest the locus of pain in this scene, the wallpaper pattern offers additional testimony in its repeated motif of a screaming mouth. Yet, more subtly, it is the external policy debate and legislative adjustments in the area of trafficking that can tell us about the bedroom-as-crime-scene. I argue that the socio-political awareness growing around sex trafficking creates the conditions for *The Journey* and a thoroughfare of visitors to enter its containers to appreciate crime; yet this same awareness may correspondingly thwart an understanding of the complexity of human trafficking and the instability of its image.

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Firstly, we should reflect on the meaning of the definition of trafficking contained in the *Trafficking Protocol*. ‘Trafficking’ extends beyond the moving of people within or across national borders, to encompass any other forms of exploitation and involvement with the victim, such that ‘[e]xploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation (Art. 3 *Trafficking Protocol*, see endnote 5). Secondly, we should reflect on who is exploiting these victims. Once the role of traffickers is over, who become the guilty? Is guilt limited to the ‘owners’ exploiting these women, because they earn a profit? Or are the clients exploiting these women as commodities (see Marmo and LaForgia 2008)?



Figure 3. The bed in the room. Reproduced courtesy of Helen Bamber Foundation, copyright of Dana Popa.

According to the recent position of the British Government, any

involvement with the victim is recognised as a form of exploitation. In its shift to punitive intervention at the beginning of this century, the Government criminalised the general consumption of paid sex (Brooks-Gordon and Gelsthorpe 2003) via the introduction of a new arrestable offence of soliciting. Through an analysis of how the position of the Home Office has changed, Brooks-Gordon and Gelsthorpe (2003) refer to the Government's double aims, formed at the end of the 1990s: on the one hand to protect the public, on the other to tackle dangerous offenders. In this new approach to criminalisation of sex workers' clients, the *kerb crawlers*, they argue about the punter and the pimp:

The public mood has shifted dramatically in the last two decades and we now see the punter and the pimp aligned as coercive and abusive characters from whom the public should be protected (Brooks-Gordon and Gelsthorpe 2003: 447).

The only logical step was to apply this view of clients to 'forced' or 'controlled' sex workers, to include the victims of trafficking. Since 2006, as part of Operation Pentameter,<sup>9</sup> men who have paid sex have been required to understand whether the sex worker is acting under duress, in which case men are urged to inform the authorities. If they fail to do so, they are liable to be prosecuted for rape.<sup>10</sup> At the end of 2008, the Home Office proposed the *Policing and Crime Bill*, which has yet to be finalised. This Bill aims to criminalise the clients who pay for sex with someone who is controlled for gain by a third party. Knowledge of the existence of such control is considered irrelevant (see (2)(a) in endnote 11).<sup>11</sup>

Despite this being a controversial point in Britain — as the prostitution debate is problematic and politicised (Sanders and Campbell 2008) — the point of punishing the consumer even when he/she has no knowledge of the exploited status of controlled prostitutes is pivotal to emphasising how *demand* has been tackled by the British Government alongside other aspects of sex offences. This approach would agree with what Gallagher and Holmes (2008) suggest to be the next step ahead in the fight against trafficking. They argue that a strong national legal framework that matches the international

*Trafficking Protocol* is strategically important and requires the inclusion of measures that go beyond the crime of trafficking.

Therefore, the criminalisation of customers becomes significant in the socio-political context of the bedroom, to the point that it can be argued that the room *helps* the British Government in its quest to criminalise customers. The bedroom testifies to ongoing crime within its walls. The trafficked person is imagined as forced to stay (often to live) in that confined space and perform sexual duties against her will to satisfy customers. Hence the British Government's view that customers need to be criminalised matches with the potential significance of the room to address forced prostitution. The condition of this slavery removes alternative imaginings: decisions to stay or go, to accept or refuse this status, and the complex understandings of 'agency' in such scenes. Here, consent, in its purely legal interpretation, cannot be applied (Marmo and Chazal 2010).

While the representation of trafficked women as solely powerless victims is counter-productive — given it does not acknowledge the greater degree of involvement of the woman in the sex trafficking process as well as other forms of trafficking (see Doezema 2000, Segrave et al 2009) — this bedroom tells the extreme story of trafficking to make a point about the *ordinariness of demand*; it emphasises scenes of sexual violence linked directly to consumption so as to say: bedrooms like this exist *because there are clients who are keen to use them*. In the context of the legal eddy around sex work, trafficking and criminalisation, it is as if violent crime *needs to be imagined* here to affect a productive message about human trafficking. In this way, whilst viewers may not need to conjure a woman chained to a bed in order to appreciate the harm of human trafficking, *The Journey's* bedroom raises awareness by stripping trafficking down to its established shocking signifiers (Lee 2007a, 2007b). The next section explores how this move to raise awareness (through horror) may not convey the 'truth' of trafficking through *The Journey's* message.



## The Public's Perception: Demanding Who Demands?

How is the reconstruction of this bedroom/crime scene perceived by 'the public' as such? This is an imagined crime scene that operates as a 'message board'. The message on the mirror says: 'help me' (Figure 4), and the receiver of the message, the viewer, is requested to internalise it and understand that a human being is kept enslaved and forced to satisfy numerous sexual requests. This is, in a way, the intended message of the exhibition. The intended message of the installers is to raise awareness. From the materials reviewed,<sup>12</sup> we can safely say that this message has been acknowledged by some visitors who have left online comments after viewing the exhibition in person or online. For example, at *The Journey* official web site, a commentator reveals:

Petition signed - art that can actually say something rather than the ever-decreasing circles of the Turner Prize.

Please keep up the campaigning — these victims need the publicity and the support you are giving them and we, the public, need the issue pushed in front of us so that we cannot ignore what's happening to our fellow human beings in our own cities and towns (RJ 2007).

On a *YouTube* website showing the bedroom, a person admits that:

This video makes me sick to my stomach. However, I wish I could have actually seen this in person. It's absolutely awful that sex trafficking is still happening in our world. I think it is great that Emma Thompson is putting so much effort into this cause. I think more people should get involved to stop sex trafficking, or at least learn more about it (O1188 2009).

Another visitor (to both the installation and online) acknowledges that:

I have never forgotten how sick I felt when I walked into the bedroom, it felt like a scene of someone's nightmare or a David Lynch film and at one point the voice you hear is that of Dennis Hopper from the film *Blue Velvet*. An extremely disturbing experience (YT 2008).





Figure 4. A detail of the bedroom. Reproduced courtesy of Helen Bamber Foundation, copyright of Dana Popa.

However, the exhibit can evoke different responses. Using the signifiers of violence, viewers may animate the space with imagined people (clients, workers), crimes (assaults, rapes, etc.), and are free to imagine landscapes of horror. The intentional absence of a woman begs the question: where is she? Amidst the traces left, she haunts the scene; and empty crime scenes gesture horror and ill ease: is she still alive? Yet the power and limits of the exhibition are represented in its imaginative life: visitors might not be moved to heed the message; they may disengage from the signifiers in the bedroom and the push to raise awareness may or may not translate into social practice. Through considering the visitor in relation to the exhibition we might begin to see how multi-layered and problematic any 'clear cut' communication about human trafficking can become in *The Journey*. If the overall aim of the exhibition is to raise awareness, one could ask how successful

the exhibition's implicit request to generate empathy is. This problem is addressed below in two main points where I argue that the exhibition may not help the viewer negotiate the different meanings and events that constitute exploitation and trafficking. It may instead support viewing positions that insist on an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy common to established understandings about sex trafficking. I now turn to consider this dichotomous approach to the bedroom.

## **1 'Us' and 'the Consumers'**

Firstly we might think of the bedroom as a place to reflect on 'the customer'. In the bedroom there is imaginative space for two participants: the worker and the customer. Who is the spectator in this scene? Are 'we' a spectator who has nothing to do with this form of crime? Would 'we' be visiting such a bedroom as part of our daily or weekly routine and pay for sex? If the answer is 'no', how might the visitor think of the customer — after all, the confronting truth is that these women are in our rich countries because there is a demand for them. Who then are the customers? Are they our husbands, brothers, friends? Are they with us when we visit this exhibition? The fact is that whilst we do not believe that 'we' are the consumers, it is *our* society which consumes sex because it is accepted, normalised and glamourised.

Yet Hughes (2005) teaches us that 'demand' is not just about customers, and this is where the lesson of the bedroom becomes thorny. Hughes suggests that, when we address 'demand', we should consider four levels: the consumers; the exploiters (brothel owner, traffickers); the state that tolerates (actively or passively) prostitution; and the general culture. Leaving the exploiters to one side, this section aims to consider the triangle of consumer-state-general culture. According to a study published for the International Organisation for Migration on demand, the clients are, among others, educated people, soldiers, police, salary men, students, athletes (Anderson and O'Connell Davidson 2003: 16). This is confirmed by Coy et al in their 2007 report on the East London area, showing that most of the clients are employed, aged between 20-40 (with a peak of 34), and half are in a relationship (2007: 1).

The British Government thought that one strategy to tackle demand was to 're-educate' men about these women, basing the various initiatives on the fact that the customer does not necessarily know that there is forced prostitution. In 2006, the Joint Committee on Human Rights in Britain published a document on human trafficking, where demand is addressed in these terms:

The Government is aware of the need to change the attitudes and opinion of men who use prostitutes towards prostitutes who may have been trafficked and get the message across that trafficked women are not consenting to sexual activities (2006 para 102: 37).

Under Operation Pentameter (2006-onwards), information and brochures were sent to men's magazines to raise the issue that these women operate against their will. In 2006, the NGO Crimestoppers produced a short video clip and uploaded it onto an internet website which resembles an authentic pornographic site, in the hope of capturing the attention of men who are in search of this type of material,<sup>13</sup> and to alert them to the fact that some of these women are forced to operate in the sex market. Therefore, the British Government's policy has insisted upon certain elements: to educate and inform (the carrot); and to punish the 'punter' (the stick). Yet, is demand for paid sex reducing? According to a survey, the answer is not only 'no', but that numbers have doubled between the 1990s and 2000 in Britain (Barton 2005).

Furthermore, within this context, it should be noted that the punishment of offenders (the clients) is accompanied by the 'protection' of the public. This grouping of the guilty separate from the moral community is an artificial division. The reality is much more complex: consumers live in that very society that the Government attempts to shelter from paid sex. The general culture, in Britain and Western society in general, indicates that consuming forms of sex is normalised. We should acknowledge that the intense socio-political debate on prostitution and trafficking occurs in the background of a society where glamourised sex is positive. For instance, one could think about how lingerie chains, such as *Agent Provocateur*, have reached main streets

in the city centres, and have become 'just another' shop. Or we could consider the televised series *Secret Diary of a Call Girl*. This series represents just another example of how 'sex is sexy', where women are empowered, performing paid sex under their own control and on their own terms in a clean glamorous environment for their own enjoyment and fulfilment. It is, therefore, the entire sex industry and forms of 'privileged male behaviour' that should be addressed (Jeffreys 2008).

If it is suggested that the consumption of prostitution (including the forced category) is a socially constructed behaviour, then an expectation that reducing the incidence of consumption by simply tackling this behaviour and re-educating men with only the carrot and stick approach is far too simplistic. The British Joint Committee comments: '[t]here is a need to tackle the culture of exploitation and commercialisation of sex, and attitudes towards women' (2006 para 107: 38). This cultural gap is further highlighted by the UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa in his closing remarks of the Vienna forum in February 2008, as *The Journey* exhibition was open to the public in a square in Vienna:

Sexist attitudes, life-styles that insult the dignity of women, and expensive media and advertising campaigns that exploit their bodies create a market for gender-based exploitation (Costa 2008).

However, what we are witnessing is the opposite trend in Britain:

Certainly we are finding that the sex industry is expanding in lap dancing, limousine services, takeaway services, and as long as you have got that expansion you are likely to have women trafficked in to fulfil those services (Joint Committee on Human Rights 2006 para 80).

How do we reconcile the attempt to re-educate consumers when sex becomes more fashionable? The visitor/consumer of the exhibition may well remain perplexed, and would try, perhaps, to draw a line: 'Am I a good consumer of the sex market or a bad consumer?' How powerful is a Government's message that forced sex is 'bad', against media who televise the opposite message, or rather that forced sex does not exist? How can this view be reconciled with the reality of trafficked women? The exhibition, and in particular the bedroom, aims to be a

reality-check for the visitors. The room is screaming: dirty, stinky, claustrophobic, as if to ask: how can you use me? But does it reach the audience? Does the visitor indeed ask: is it one of us who consumes sex here? Consequently, doubts are cast on the success of the exhibition's intended message, as to whether the visitor would consider himself/herself as part of the society which consumes the product on offer, or whether he/she would walk away in denial.

## **2 'Us' and 'the Others'**

Secondly, we might consider the absent woman in the bedroom and her reduction to the community of 'others'—trafficked women from foreign countries. 'Us', as the sheltered moral community, become clearly distinct from the 'others' who are the foreigners, prostitutes, and perhaps eventually 'victims'. As highlighted in 2006 by the Joint Committee, otherness becomes even more problematic in the area of trafficking as: 'it has been argued that there is a culture that is negative towards migrants, making it easier for employers and others to exploit them' (2006 para 103: 38).

Representing and visualising *otherness* through art exhibitions is always challenging. Hallam and Street (2000) address this point by emphasising that portraying otherness is itself a form of interpretation of what otherness is. As viewers of *The Journey* we construct or deconstruct the material offered to 'us' on the basis of how much or how little we know, or how much we are sympathetic towards the object of the representation: the 'others'. For instance, we might sympathise with the fate of these women as we follow the signifiers of violence; in a way the bedroom is conceived and constructed to cause shock and horror: the stained bed, the noise, the wallpaper are all placed in a manner to indicate repulsion. However, do we really understand that they, the 'others', are the exotic *product* for our consumption, and are forced to 'operate'? Interestingly, Anderson and O'Connell Davidson reveal that clients do not perceive a difference between a voluntary sex worker and a forced sex worker:

In particular, the interview research found that those clients who knowingly used trafficked/unfree prostitutes did not perceive of sex workers as consenting subjects within the prostitution contract. Instead, they seemed to think that in prostitution, women/girls actually became objects or commodities, and that clients could therefore acquire temporary powers of possession over them (2003: 24).

Within this context, Anderson and O'Connell Davidson's survey also reveals that a third of their sample-clients consider migrant sex workers more value for money, as they are 'cheaper and more malleable than local women' (2003: 21).

The otherness becomes therefore an important element of analysis of detachment to justify exploitation. We visit the bedroom, we are informed via signage that a Moldavian girl or a Chinese girl is the potential victim, and we use the diversity as a way of detaching ourselves from the destiny of these *lesser* women (Todres 2009). The sense of detachment can generate a lack of direct link with the victims: they are not our mothers, sisters, friends; they are foreigners who intended to migrate to the destination country, bypassing the legal migration process. Otherness, consequently, brings inaction and selective responses (Todres 2009).

Nevertheless, the role of the bedroom is to address this core issue, and to possibly generate some sympathetic feelings in the visitor's mind, notwithstanding the country of origin of these women. The bedroom invites us, and helps us up to a point, to imagine the horror of being enslaved. In that sense, the bedroom becomes a conduit through which we gain an appreciation of what it is to be 'the other'. Failing this sense of connection with another human being, produced by the powerful visual impact of the bedroom, the visitor may be leaving the exhibit believing that 'this will not happen to us', re-establishing the othering strategy of detachment. A key question emerges here — can we imagine these women any other way? *The Journey* posits one journey of women trafficked for sex, but are there others?

Marmo and LaForgia (2008) argue that these outsider women, in a twist of roles, even become guilty of 'corrupting' the internal/national

moral society — the very one that the British Government wants to protect for instance. By becoming more visible, by being rescued, by becoming witnesses to their own *journeys*, these women expose a reality of the sheltered society. This reality refers to the fact that the receiving countries are already ‘corrupted’ and ‘in demand’; the cycle does not start with these women migrating into the destination country and creating demand, but with the pre-existence of a flourishing sex market:

So, trafficked women are unwanted, are irregular and are corrupting a moral society. Trafficked women become a symbol of abjection. As abject, these women are located outside the normality of the moral community. Through the recognition of trafficked women as victims, society is forced to face an abject entity, which is cast out of the acceptable moral values. Society is forced to face these women, which had been part of it, silently and invisibly (Marmo and LaForgia 2008: 7).

By facing these women, society is forced to reflect on the reasons why they are imported. The power of the bedroom rests in the fact that it forces us to face the existence of demand. However questions remain as to whether we, the visitors, are *given the room* to truly imagine the conditions and contexts for trafficking beyond this typical ‘otherness’; that is, scenes that might enable us to sympathise beyond a moment of horror and locate trafficking inside our society and its daily routines.

### 3 Art and Education

In both ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomies, one would question the degree of understanding or empathy when visiting the bedroom. As highlighted by Bourdieu, ‘[a]ny art perception involves a conscious or unconscious deciphering operation’ (1993: 215). He insists by saying that we, as observers, need to master a ‘cultural code’ to decipher the message. Bourdieu claims that:

Whenever these specific conditions [how to decipher the cultural codes] are not fulfilled, misunderstanding is inevitable: the illusion of immediate comprehension leads to an illusory comprehension based

on a mistaken code (1993: 216).

Therefore, alongside the intended message to raise awareness, this article questions the unintended message. Unintended messages can be broken into two general groups: on the one hand, we can identify a 'competent perception', and on the other there is the 'uninitiated perception', as Bourdieu would suggest (1993). In both cases, we should ask whether we are given enough background knowledge to absorb the material directly through the exhibition, or indirectly via other channels, or both. The fact that the UN embraced the initiative, as part of the UN Global Conference on Human Trafficking in Vienna 2008, means that the 'competent perception' can absorb the material and 'give voice' to the horror stories of these victims.

We know little about the uninitiated perception. Did the person intend to go to the exhibition, or did this person happen to be there, in Trafalgar Square, and visit *The Journey*? The initial intention to observe the material, however, is less significant compared to the connection to the material once in the bedroom (and other containers). Was it a stroll through the containers done out of curiosity? Was this the first time that the visitor was exposed to this reality? What was his/her understanding and background knowledge about this problem before they visited? Was the bedroom taken as reconstructed reality, filtered reality, or exaggerated reality?

Best (1985) claims that understanding a work of art and 'feeling it' are directly linked: developing feelings requires understanding. He argues that 'the education of feeling in the arts consists in giving reasons for [it], and encouraging people to recognise for themselves different conceptions of a work of art' (Best 1985: 128). The bedroom makes 'sense' as part of *The Journey*. *The Journey*, through its containers, explains the ordeal of a trafficked person, the initial ambitions, the violence, the fear, the isolation, the segregated life. The visitor to the exhibition, through being exposed to their *journey*, should be put in a condition to appreciate the grave nature of the trafficked person's situation. The visitor is — indirectly — *educated* to develop feelings towards the others via symbolic and visual reasoning.



Somewhat differently, Bourdieu explains that tools to understand the exhibit offered to the spectator are not internalised simply because there is a predisposition to embrace the message. Understanding and deciphering cultural goods can be achieved only with some background information, when the visitor has been educated by family, school or others to embrace and appreciate the cultural goods. Bourdieu writes:

[T]he satisfactions attached to this perception [the perception of the exhibit] ... are only accessible to those who are *disposed* to appropriate them because they *attribute a value to them*, it being understood that they can do this only if they have the means to appropriate them (1993: 226, first emphasis added).

Indeed, the bedroom tries to create a visible, visceral, tangible impact through a static representation of life conditions. Background information (provided in information sheets affixed to the walls) is given to the visitor as he or she walks through the containers. The bedroom, in the middle, may well represent the pinnacle of emotions because human senses (sight, smell, and hearing) as well as rational reasoning are engaged. Is this background information enough? Or do we need some further extensive educative programs within society to understand and respond effectively to the specificity of this bedroom's message?

In actuality, the reality is far worse than the bedroom can convey. For instance, the latest UN.GIFT report highlights that not only a high percentage of women are involved in the 'business' as perpetrators, but also some of these women were previously victims:

[A] disproportionate number of women are involved in human trafficking, not only as victims (which we knew), but also as traffickers (first documented here). Female offenders have a more prominent role in present-day slavery than in most other forms of crime. This fact needs to be addressed, especially the cases where former victims have become perpetrators (The UNODC Executive Director Costa, UN.GIFT 2009d: 6).

We can argue that this evidence shows how the cycle of trafficking *swallows* its victims first as products to be consumed and later as perpetrators. In this recent understanding of trafficking, the 'others',

the victims, having paid off their debts, have positioned themselves differently, and have become the exploiter, welcoming the customer, making profit out of exploitation. This has added a new layer of complexity for international policy makers and is an aspect of sex trafficking that the installation does not account for.

### Conclusion

*The Journey* exhibition tries to tackle an ambitious aim: to generate, in a shocking and stimulating manner, an emotional response, a sense of awareness and appreciation of the problem of sex trafficking. The exhibition tries to reach the public, the 'normal' sheltered community, 'us', the consumers of sex in a sexualised society, and to provoke indignation as well as serving a social utility by assisting a human rights cause. The bedroom, based explicitly on a real victim's recollection of the 'office', is designed to provoke and disturb the destination society. Raising awareness is the direct function of the room, the intended message signed in horror: Does the bedroom have an effect on 'us'? Is the background noise unbearable? Can we perceive the struggle and the horror? Does the smell of the room make us feel sick? Can we see there is no escape? Ultimately, we can exit the bedroom at will whereas trafficked women may not.

Whilst the bedroom-as-crime-scene denotes one journey by stripping trafficking down to a set of shocking signifiers, perhaps its hidden power resides in the fact that having been exposed to it, a diminution in real bedrooms may occur in the future.

### Notes

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- 1 The exhibition is known interchangeably as *The Journey* and (most recently) *Journey*, see for example *Journey NYC* in New York City, November 2009 at <[http://www.helenbamber.org/Journey\\_NYC.html](http://www.helenbamber.org/Journey_NYC.html)>.
- 2 UN.GIFT (2008: 6-7) does acknowledge, though, how challenging it is to collect reliable and consistent statistics in this area (for instance, UN.GIFT cites the NGO Free the Slaves's estimate of around 27 million slaves across the world). UN.GIFT also addresses the fact that several bodies are measuring the problem using different methods, adding to the confusion.
- 3 UN.GIFT (2009d: 6) acknowledges that trafficking for sexual exploitation is perhaps the area that has caught most people's attention and interest for the constant verbal, physical and psychological abuse of the victims, and therefore has also become more visible than other forms of exploitation. It should be pointed out that the article engages with the material produced in the exhibition, which deals with extreme situations of exploitation related to trafficking for the sex market. Opposed to this, it is acknowledged that there are many cases of human beings who engage actively with the opportunities that movements across borders can offer, and are often caught in the exploitative predicament and conditions of migration processes (see for instance Doezeema 2000, Lee 2007a, Seagrave et al 2009, Marmo and Chazal 2010).
- 4 Age registered on the basis of victims helped by IOM (International Organisation for Migration) (2006) which assisted 7,711 victims between the period 1999 to 2005.
- 5 Art. 3: 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purposes of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.'

- 6 This means that the Trafficking Protocol cannot be signed up, without signing up for the Palermo Convention. This Convention is the 2000 Convention against Transnational Organised Crime adopted by the UN General Assembly resolution 55/25.
- 7 Emma Thompson, amongst other initiatives, also offered her face and body to illustrate the disembodiment of 'Elena', the victim of trafficking, from 'Maria', the forced sex worker who 'doesn't feel anything anymore', in a distressing video clip to help people understand the reality of these women. See the video *Trafficking is a torture* at <<http://www.youtube.com/user/UNGIFT08>>.
- 8 The room at <[http://www.the-journey.co.uk/index.php?page\\_id=25](http://www.the-journey.co.uk/index.php?page_id=25)>.
- 9 A multi-agency operation to tackle trafficking and protect victims in the UK, involving 55 police forces in the UK, as well as the immigration service, National Criminal Intelligence Service, Foreign Office and representatives from the travel industry.
- 10 Muir and Taylor (2006): 'South Yorkshire deputy chief constable Grahame Maxwell, Pentameter's programme director, said: 'Trafficked women are being forced to work through fear and intimidation. Men who act as their clients risk being charged with rape' (*The Guardian* 25 April <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/apr/25/ukcrime.prisonsandprobation>> accessed 20 April 2009).
- 11 From *The Policing and Crime Bill*, as amended in Public Bill Committee (27/02/09): 13 Paying for sexual services of a controlled prostitute: England and Wales, After section 53 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (c. 42) insert— "53A Paying for sexual services of a prostitute controlled for gain (1) A person (A) commits an offence if— (a) A makes or promises payment for the sexual services of a prostitute (B), and (b) any of B's activities relating to the provision of those services are intentionally controlled for gain by a third person (C). (2) The following are irrelevant— (a) where in the world the sexual services are to be provided and whether those services are provided, (b) whether A is, or ought to be, aware that any of B's activities are controlled for gain".
- 12 At *The Journey* official web site <<http://www.the-journey.co.uk/>>, the Bamber Foundation's web site <<http://www.helenbamber.org/>>, and youtube videos with images of the room (for instance <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9auqa9\\_VoiY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9auqa9_VoiY&feature=related)>).

13 See the short video at <<http://www.freensextrafficking.co.uk/trafficmovie.html>>.

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